

**URBAN SPACE AND INSURGENT PRACTICES IN PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL**  
**ESPAÇO URBANO E PRÁTICAS INSURGENTES NO 4º DISTRITO DE PORTO ALEGRE**  
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## Abstract

Urban spaces are built from complex layers of territory. The relationships between different social agents result in this construction and in the consolidation of spaces' territorialization. The present work follows the criticism on the hegemonic thinking in architecture and urban planning. This article aims to understand the counter-hegemonic spatial practices, developed by heterogeneous actors, as strategies of urban space territorialization. The main goal is to analyze how the articulation between different social agents appears in the territorialization and spatialization of the developed practices. Therefore, the methodological approach used is a case study about the spatial area 4th District of Porto Alegre. In addition, non-participant observation at seminars and events held by social agents was part of the method, as well as interviews with local representatives. As a result, we assess the construction of action networks of counter-hegemonic territorialization. Considering particularities, they operate in different ways on the resistance to the dominant urban planning culture, which repeatedly neglects the demands of poor and vulnerable people.

**Keywords:** Territory, Territorialization, Spatial Practices, Insurgent Practices

## 1 Introduction

Insurgent practices of urban communities need their territories, which are their speech place. The insurgence, in this article, is considered resistance to staying in the city. In the production of urban space, insurgencies of non-hegemonic social groups allow actors to remain in the dispute for urban land. The dynamics of socio-spatial networks, whether in the fight for decent housing, or in the confrontation with the valorization of urban land, or even in the often violent, legal and spatial instability of their settlements are recurrent conditions in Brazilian metropolises.

In the technical-scientific-information environment in which we live, insurgent practices are a possibility of contesting the bad conditions of habitability in Brazilian precarious settlements, building ways of organizing social actors in a network. In Brazil, many communities live in unstable and insecure situations. In this way, they are constantly exposed to the transience between the legal and the illegal. Around the world, popular settlements cannot be generalized as illegal, due to differences, irresolutions and overlaps characteristic of the formation of occupations (Rolnik, 2015). However, the formal-legal construction to which urban spaces are submitted, in accordance with the dominant precepts of their society, prevents residents of "illegal" settlements from being adequately contemplated with formal rights, such as the right of possession. These resolutions deprive them of access to the city, its equipment and basic infrastructure.

The advance of real estate and financial capital in different cities on the planet accelerates the process of deterritorialization of communities that live in areas of interest to dominant actors, mainly large construction companies. Removal actions, often violent, are justified by the need for revitalization that adequates the neoliberal consumption agendas of urban space. It is in this context that the spatial area analyzed is inserted: the 4th District of Porto Alegre/RS. In southern Brazil, it was the olden industrial district of the city, which went through a period of ascension (1892 - 1950) and obsolescence (1970 - 1990). Currently, the district is a territory of interest to the government and the real estate market. Considering its location, infrastructure and occupation potential, the restructuring discourse focuses on the 4th district.

In this article, we start from the understanding that other forms of building territories, in addition to the hegemonic practices favored by the State, are strongly present in the urban space, either in isolated ways or through integration with other territories. However, to investigate them, it is necessary to decolonize the hegemonic thinking in architecture and urbanism, reassessing ways of claiming the Right to the City in Lefebvre (2001) terms. The author, who understands the Right to the City as a Right to Urban Life, points to the need of building meeting places, prioritizing use value to the detriment of exchange value. It is in this sense that the article aims to contribute to discussions and reflections about the production and renovation of cities by the hands of transdisciplinary actors. We assume these actors seek to challenge the homogeneity of construction of urban space through counter-hegemonic spatial practices, strengthening the construction of action networks and articulation with other actors.

Thus, this article aims to analyze the insurgent spatial practices built as a support strategy for disadvantaged families and communities by the territory revitalization projects, which collaboratively create resistance tactics and confront current projects. For this purpose, specific goals were developed. In addition to assisting in reaching the overall goal, they directly reflect on the methodological approach. The first one was the identification of counter-hegemonic agents through fieldwork developed through non-participant observation and mapping, identification, location and characterization of counter-hegemonic practices. The second specific goal was the observation of conflict or collaboration relationships between these agents. For this, semi-structured interviews were used that resulted in the analysis of the reverberation of the agents' actions in the territory. In addition, the analysis of the spatialization of the practices carried out based on the theoretical framework was carried out.

The article is organized following these items: the discussion about network-territories and the actors network; a brief presentation on the 4th District in Porto Alegre; the territory through spatial and daily practices.

## **2 Territorialization: The Construction of Territory through Actors Spatial Practices and Actors-Network**

The actions of groups and communities in spaces are important components of territory legitimation. Isolated actions or in association with other actors give identity and purpose to spaces, in addition to the ability to corroborate or refute narratives. For Raffestin (1993), a territory does not exist without a work projection and an action development. We call territorialization these works and actions developed in the spaces that make them a territory. The various combinations that can be established during the implementation of territorialization, for Haesbaert (2004), open the way for the territory to be conceived through innumerable perspectives.

Raffestin (1993) also approaches the territory as a space for organization and competition between actors in the network. When we analyze the layers included in the production of the territory, according to Raffestin (1993), we can identify the functional differentiation, that is understood by the different uses and occupations of the space. In addition, the differentiation commanded by the hierarchical principle contributes to organizing the territory, corroborating the importance given to territorialization actions by individuals and groups. Hierarchical differentiation is about the ability to legitimize certain actions based on power relations. In this sense, actions by non-hegemonic actors tend to be neglected, enhancing performances with greater commercial appeal and support from dominant actors. However, at different levels, all actors are responsible for producing the territory. Thus, we are faced with a field of power:

This production of territory is perfectly inscribed in the field of power of our relational problematic. We all combine energy and information, which we structure with codes according to certain objectives. We all elaborate production strategies, which collide with other strategies in various power relations. (Raffestin, 1993, p. 153, our translation).

When we talk about territory, mainly based on Raffestin (1993), we are talking about limits established through power relations and given actors or groups of actors capacity to control a portion of space. Thus, territoriality is the action that delimits and gives life to a territory, with spatial, strategic or tactical practices that configure it. The territory is, simultaneously, product and process of relations of those who configure it, as well as its interfaces with others. Likewise, territoriality is constituted not only by social groups relating to the space they occupy, but also with other actors that make up other territories.

Sack (1986), when discussing the importance of human territorialities in the city, points to the existence of control over space by certain actors. The identification of the actor(s) who exercise(s) control over the space is crucial to recognize where the spatial and social intentions that materialize in a given sector of the city come from and what objectives and social actors are involved in this process. In this way, considering these authors, the effective territorialization of space is engendered in arrangements between different social actors who work collaborating or competing with each other. Such territorialities are given from spatial practices, which can be subdivided according to the original intentions of each agent.

Corporate practices were widely developed by Corrêa (1992; 2000), who addresses the result of strategic actions by corporations in the large companies territorialization and spatialization process. Souza (2018) presents contesting and claiming insurgent spatial practices as a way to expand the possibilities of analysis about spatialization and territorialization

based on spatial practices. Souza's studies (2018) give the possibility of analyzing counter-hegemonic social actors, groups and individuals organized in favor of their rights and of their ways of life legitimization, so as not to be just subordinated to the dominant practices of hegemonic actors.

Despite the hegemonic structure favoring combinations between dominant actors, other possibilities are developed as a way of claiming spaces and appropriating territories. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic actors structure actions that transform the urban space through spatial and daily practices, which are directly related to the domain and appropriation in the territory. According to Souza (2018), the main difference between spatial practices, which we will call here "hegemonic spatial practices" and "insurgent practices", is the collaborative and contesting purpose of the latter.

According to Souza (2018), insurgent spatial practices are potent political instruments for claiming spaces. They are the ability to build splinter territories that can exist for hours, days or that can settle down. Territories built through insurgent practices are surrounded by the constant demand for struggle and defense of their limits and delimitations. The insurgent spatial practices bring at their core the claim for a city in which "belonging" is not guided only by the ability to consume and perform, in accordance with the guidelines of large financial institutions. In the rhythm of the streets and everyday needs, insurgent practices are articulated by groups and collectives that make the city by living it.

When we look closer at the relationships constituted between the actors, we notice that the complexity is increased. Many of them have an articulation that allows the identification of the territory they occupy as a "continuous territory". This does not mean that continuous territories cannot have relations with other actors or even with other territories, conferring the constitution of a network of actors. When we refer to network, we return to the idea of "network territories", discussed by Souza (2000), so the nodes of a network can intersperse with the "nodes" of other networks. The "network territories" are called by Souza (2000) "discontinuous territories", in which it is possible to look at each point, configuring itself in a territory — or nanoterritory. For the author, the complexity of network territories requires that the idea of a single territorializing power be excluded, especially when, as is the case of the 4th District, there is an overlapping of different territories, with varied and non-coincident limits and with possible contradictions between different territories.

### **3 Territorialization Construction through Counter-hegemony and Insurgents Actions**

The spatial clipping used to investigate the insurgent spatial practices in Porto Alegre/RS is the 4th District. Consolidated as an old industrial district of the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, the 4th District has been transformed over the years and has gone from a territory with strong economic and commercial appeal to a territory, in some aspects, obsolete and degraded. The territory, including Farrapos, Humaitá, Navegantes, São Geraldo, and Floresta neighborhoods, was the target of a series of restructuring and revitalization attempts, as shown in Figure 1. Currently, such attempts continue ostensibly and put pressure on the poor and vulnerable communities settled in the region. Efforts for the preparation of this article are concentrated on the analysis of insurgent spatial practices carried out by non-hegemonic actors, mostly gathered in the northern region, but with associations and networks that transit throughout the entire territory.

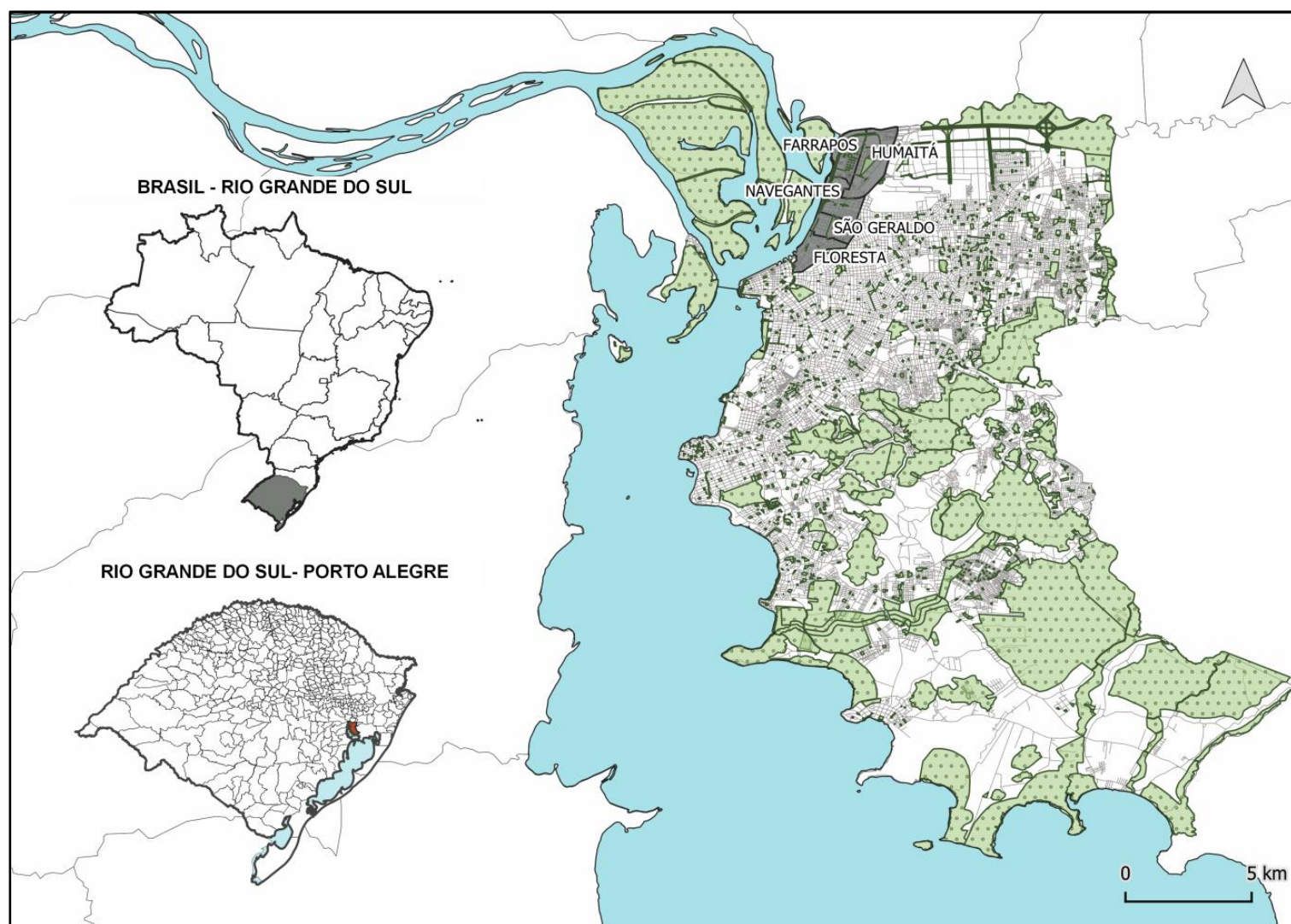


Fig. 1: Location map of the 4th District in the city of Porto Alegre. Source: Almeida; Campos, 2022.

In analyzing the spatial area studied, it was possible to identify some actions that are aligned with the construction of reality transformation practices by non-hegemonic actors. Rolnik (2019) suggests that contesting practices, such as the practices presented below, require attention, pointing to the need to decolonize the imaginary and overcome an ideal of modernization. The author's proposal is daring but fundamental, at a time when homogeneity has become part of the guidelines for restructuring and revitalizing spaces of different scales. Wherever you look, it is possible to identify a new building with large mirrored facades, floors and excessively polished stones. It's not by chance. The choice of these elements reflects — literally and figuratively — the quest to demonstrate power, prosperity and wealth.

Analyzing some relationships and networks in the territory of the 4th District, it was possible to identify examples related to insurgent practices. Training the eye to recognize other urban planning languages, in addition to urban plans and projects, is necessary to avoid social exclusion and dispossession of urban spaces that conform neocolonial domination. As examples of insurgent practices, we will analyze the work of *Ksa Rosa* (2017), which aims to reduce damage to the environment and human beings by welcoming waste pickers and people in vulnerable situations. We will also analyze the Forum of the 4th District, a project conceived from a public hearing carried out in a movement of denunciation by the State Council of Human Rights of Rio Grande do Sul (CEDH-RS) of the conditions in which about nineteen communities located in the North end of the 4th District live.

The 4th District Forum, amid the advances of the Covid 19 Pandemic, focused on organizing campaigns to donate food, masks and distribute booklets with information on how to protect yourself against the virus and register to receive help from the government. In May 2020, the project was selected by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation's emergency support notice. Designed around three axes — food security, sustainability and communication — the project proposed to help vulnerable

families in the region with information and subsistence items. The project was developed through two structures: the Sepé Tiarajú Environmental and Recycling Cooperative and the Vinte de Novembro Work and Housing Cooperative. Within them, actions that served the families linked to cooperatives and the population in general were carried out. Thus, the territory of direct advocacy consisted of the communities visited through the mission carried out by the Permanent Commission for the Defense of Human Rights of Rio Grande do Sul (CDH-RS), shown in Figure 2 (CEDH-RS, 2020).

For one of the organizers of the Forum, the presence of the Sepé Tiarajú and Vinte de Novembro cooperatives gave strength to the project. Unlike the communities that participated voluntarily, the cooperatives already carried out support work for families linked to their spaces, as they were structured and recognized in the territory. While Sepé Tiarajú conducted a food collection campaign for families linked to the recycling shed, Vinte de Novembro had equipment and labor to make masks, soap and, later, T-shirts that were sold. Cooperative Vinte de Novembro is one of the actors-network identified in the research but, unlike the other actors and actors-network that make up the Forum of the 4th District, it is located in the Floresta neighborhood. The cooperative plays an important role in articulating with the communities located at the northern end of the territory, as it is a node, which, under the light of another scale, presents its own complexity and internal organization. The cooperative occupies an unfinished state building, which had been abandoned for over fifty years and is currently occupied by forty families who have transformed it into social housing.

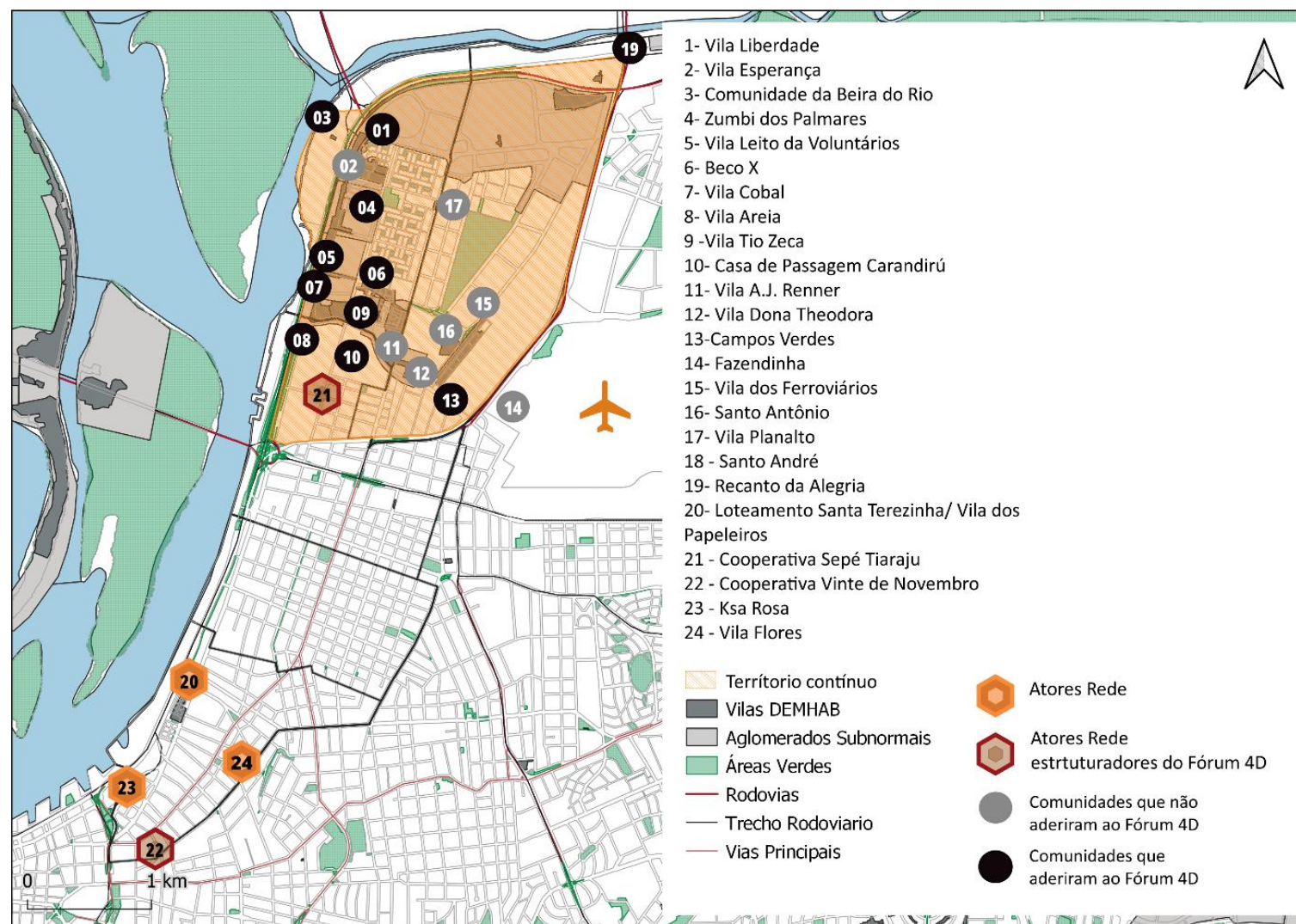
In a context of intense dispossession and real estate speculation, the occupation of the building can be classified as “bottom-up revitalization” (Souza, 2018), representing a tension against conventional and colonizing urban planning. In the territorial and socio-spatial perspective, the articulation between a continuous territory, generated by the surface where the communities are located, and a point (Twentieth of November cooperative) with a strong internal and external structure represents the possibility of forming a network.

Although there is no direct connection between the communities linked to the Forum of the 4th District, its structuring actor-networks and Ksa Rosa, the latter represents another structuring element located in the Floresta neighborhood, because it promotes insurgent spatial practices through processes and social relations developed in their daily lives. Maristone Moura, coordinator and creator of Ksa Rosa, highlights the need to welcome and build a bond through the responsibility and autonomy of each individual. Therefore, it is necessary to establish awareness of a work done in a network, prioritizing access to culture, and social and environmental responsibility. The main activity developed at Ksa is linked to recycling. This and other income-generating activities, such as making soap, make it possible to continue the hosting work.

The formation of a spatial network of actors in collaboration was formed as Ksa develops partnerships with Vila Flores, based on the collection of waste produced at the Cultural Association, and with the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). The collaboration with UFRGS has been taking place since 2017, through the discipline of Architectural Design II at the Faculty of Architecture and an extension project by the Art Institute since 2019. In actions linked to UFRGS, Ksa Rosa represents an element of intervention and study through practical and theoretical classes about constructive techniques and construction from the sensible, which consider the functional need and also the meaning of each element already built. For Prof. Fernando Fuão, one of the architects, professor of the subject and coordinator of the extension project, the goal of the classes is to relate theory, practice and execution, culminating in a process that involves learning the project, the construction of the object, the execution and all the practice relationship with the Ksa Rosa collective (AESCOA, 2021).

The socio-spatial relations and insurgent practices of the non-hegemonic actors of the 4th District can be seen as a path yet to be paved. The current model of urban planning, strongly supported by neoliberal principles, increasingly pushes the population into spaces without living conditions, especially in peripheral countries. It is necessary to think about ways of planning cities that are not subordinated to hegemonic practices. In Figure 2, we mapped: (i) the visited communities that joined the 4D Forum, (ii) those that did not and (iii) the network actors that act as structuring in the Forum, but not only in it. In addition, there are network-actors who work in isolation, but who sometimes connect and approach, articulating in the territory.



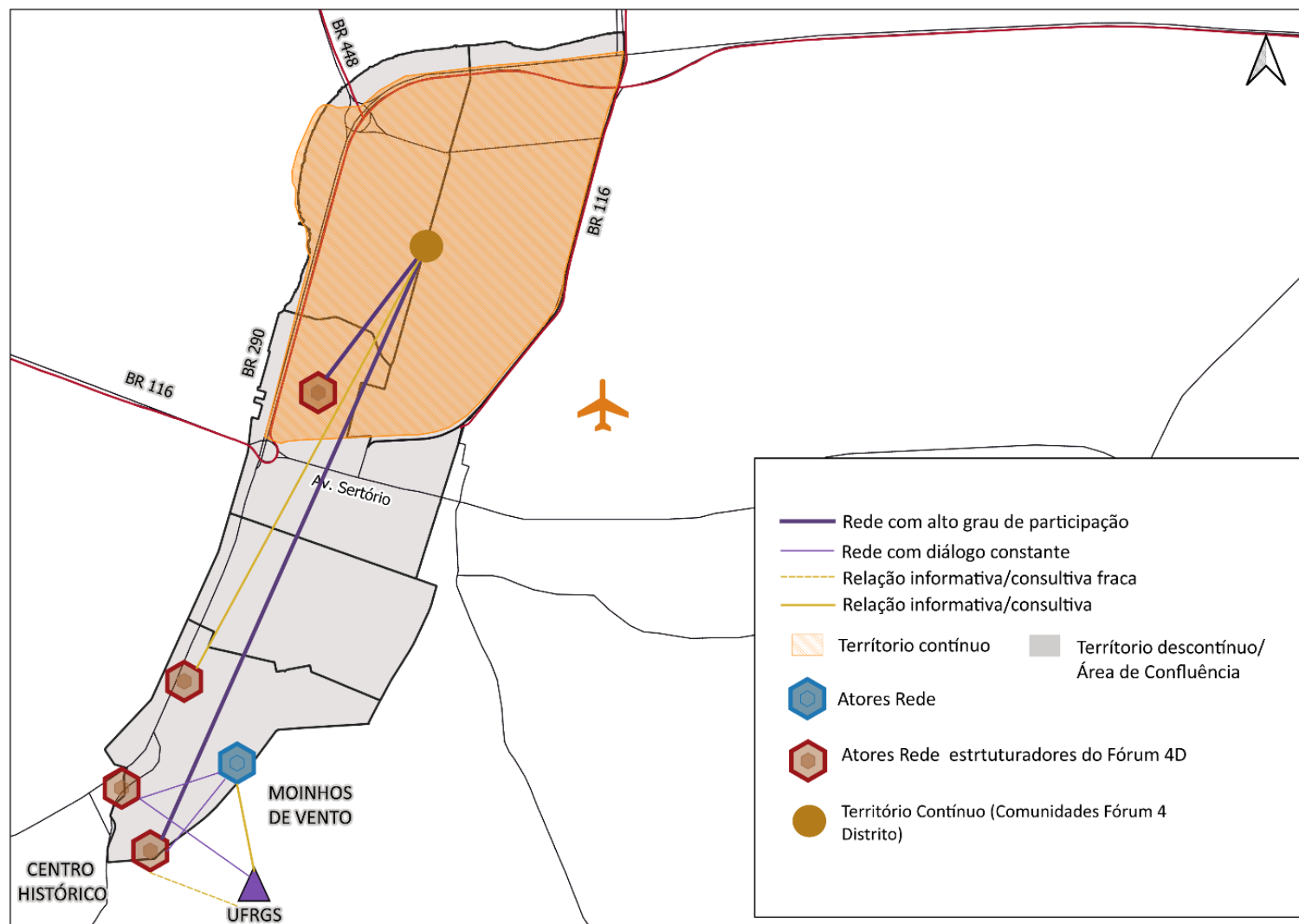


**Fig. 2:** Territorial relationship between spatial elements. Source: Prepared by Nicole Leal de Almeida, in 2022. From data provided by IBGE (2010), Datapoa (n/d), DNIT (n/d), Observapoa (n/d); Source: CDH- RS (2019).

It is noticed that the network between Vinte de Novembro cooperative (22) and the continuous territory (network of actors) — located at opposite ends — configures a tensioning from the margins to the center, in Rosa (2018) terms. It also brings together, even if in a latent way, the continuous territory communities of the actor-network located nearby. In addition to the close relationship with the continuous territory, the Vinte de Novembro cooperative maintains a close relationship with Associação Cultural Vila Flores, with whom dialogue began through the architecture office AH! Human Architecture. The office occupies one of the commercial rooms at Vila Flores and is responsible for the cooperative project, which was awaiting release by the Minha Casa Minha Vida — Entidades Program (MCMV-E). This approximation is due to the link between the Cooperative and the National Movement for the Fight for Housing and attention to the need to build relationships with different actors in the territory. The distance between other actors-network and actors located further north of the 4th District occurs spontaneously. According to the representative, there is an understanding that the Cultural Association is a vector of the process of creative economies that has been rising in recent years in the 4th District and does not dialogue with the demands of the communities. However, for the interviewee, there is a movement for this approximation and dialogue to happen, even if gradually.

Regarding the articulation between the Vila Flores Cultural Association and the communities of the 4th District, the community that is most connected to Vila Flores is Vila Santa Terezinha, an actor-network that provides the construction of joint projects between the actors-network. According to a representative of the Cultural Association, the approximation took place through identification with the work already developed by the Marista Social Center with the residents of the community aimed at culture and education through music and theater. The initial intention was to create a route from Vila Santa Terezinha to Vila Flores, marked by the interaction between the actors in the vicinity. Another point brought up by the interviewee is the relationship between Vila Flores and the Vinte de Novembro cooperative, which serves as an inspiration for the development

of projects. Considering this approach, the intention is to build a network of knowledge about the construction and operation of a cooperative that allows Vila Santa Terezinha to create its own cooperative. The network-territory in the 4th District, as shown in Figure 03, is composed of these relationships between actors (conforming network-actors) and social territories. The Vinte de Novembro occupation appears, in this context, as a protagonist in the articulation between communities. The Vila Flores Cultural Center, on the other hand, dialogues and acts both with communities and in actions with new actors stimulated by the process of transformation of the area, such as brewers, for example. External actors also participate in this territory-network, as is the case of UFRGS.



**Fig. 3:** Comparative diagram between actors- networks and territory- network of 4th District. Source: Prepared by Nicole Leal de Almeida, in 2022. From data provided by IBGE (2010), Datapoa (n/d), DNIT (n/d), Observapoa (n/d).

The diagram reveals important aspects of the relationships that define the actors-network in the 4th District, among which we highlight some below. Sepé Tiaraju cooperative appears as a fundamental actor-network in defining the continuous territory to the north, and Vila Flores occupies an important position in the articulation of communities to the south, which, however, does not seem to constitute a continuous territory. This occurs mainly because the urban fabric and land use in its vicinity are more diversified, involving actors who do not yet participate in integration strategies between new ventures (such as breweries, for example) and low-income communities. Vila Flores responds as the main representative of the creative industry in the sector, appears as a non-insurgent actor-network, acting as an intermediary and articulator between various low-income communities. Also, Vila Flores establishes important dialogues with the local government and collaborating actors from other parts of the territory of the 4th District, and external to the area, as is the case of UFRGS. This articulating role can be justified by the historical relationships between Vila Flores and the sector.

Another important aspect to highlight is that the physical proximity between the actors does not imply a direct relationship between them (either informative or participatory). This happens mainly between the continuous territories of low-income communities with insurgent spatial practices, as is the case of Ksa Rosa, Vinte de Novembro Occupation, Santa Terezinha



and Sepé Tiaraju Cooperatives (there is even a weak articulation between them). Among such communities, two structuring actor-networks stand out: one to the north of the area (Sepé Tiaraju Cooperative) and another to the south on the boundary between the 4th District and the central area (Vinte de Novembro), constituting strategic forces in the area.

Relationships with a high degree of participation and dialogue between actors are important and present components among strategic actors within the sector. On the other hand, consultative and informative relationships occur, but in a less intense way. The tensions of creative insurgencies of social groups seem to start from their territories and actors towards the construction of new networks of actors, shaping new territories. Despite their particularities, they are part of counter-hegemonic territorialization actions. The observed insurgent practices dispute the territory, they are not only passive to the events of productive restructuring of the space, but they ascend through gaps of capitalism in the urban space, from their own terms.

#### 4 Final Considerations

The complexity of the territory layers that make up the urban space represents a challenge to the analysis of the dynamics of social actors in the process of territorialization. Bearing in mind the multiplicity of possible developments, attention was needed so as not to lose sight of the central goal: to analyze the insurgent spatial practices, constructed as counter-hegemonic actions, which collaboratively create resistance and confrontation tactics against hegemonic projects and criticism on the way of producing and thinking about cities. Such referral is justified insofar cities are being built from a neoliberal way, which overvalues self-identification through consumption, to the detriment of the construction of urban spaces that encourage encounter, contemplation and interactivity among all.

The article discussed insurgent practices of counter-hegemonic groups that inhabit and operate in the 4th District of Porto Alegre, an old industrial area close to the Historic Center, which has stood out as an area of interest for the real estate market of large construction companies in Porto Alegre and on which, currently, processes are being processed with a view to approving the Revitalization project of the Municipality of Porto Alegre. Throughout the research, it was possible to verify, as assumed in the introduction, that, in a strategic way, actors and actors-network are articulated in favor of contesting the dominant model of construction of cities and continue in the search for guaranteeing access to housing, infrastructure and sanitation, and also to urban life in the city. According to Lefebvre (2001), these actors work in defense of autonomy and the common.

In order to reach the initial objectives, it was necessary to build a theoretical framework, presented in the second item, to guide and contextualize the reader, in addition to allowing the understanding and identification of the analyzed actors' actions. Next, the spatial outline for conducting the field work and non-participant observation was presented, which allowed the identification of the actors movements that resist the onslaughts of the dominant ones. The practices organized by counter-hegemonic actors are opposed to the dominant ones, since they build tools to tension the subordination to which they are submitted. Thus, there was the construction of collaboration networks between different actors who act on different fronts, and who seek the legitimacy of their spatial and everyday practices.

The insurgent practices identified in the territory seek decent living conditions based on alternative work circuits, income generation and the development of culture and autonomy, in addition to the guarantee of stability through ownership. In the 4th District, the role of resistance of the network organization of actors is highlighted. In this way, Vinte de Novembro turned out to be an important link between the communities in the area. The Vila Flores cultural center is an example of solidarity economy, which seems to transit, directly or indirectly, between several actors: the Twenty of November, the new economic actors, in addition to the connection with universities. However, such a claim would require further investigation into the nature of their practices. It is understood that a deeper reflection on the (re)construction of an urban planning culture that recognizes insurgent practices and their territoriality is urgent and necessary, considering that the network territories, of a more political nature. These are important forms of resistance and struggle for the right to belong and occupy urban spaces.

During the research, some limitations were found. The context of the Covid-19 pandemic restricted fieldwork and the in-depth analysis of insurgent actions. In addition, the impracticability of the continuity of the work of some groups limited the work, as is the case of the Forum of the 4th District, which during the pandemic concentrated its efforts on emergency health demands and hunger mitigation. However, in more recent activities, the Forum continues to work in conjunction with

communities and actors at regional and national levels. In April 2022, in partnership with the National Forum for Urban Reform and other movements and entities, the Mission-Denunciation of evictions in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre was carried out. The delegation that carried out the mission held listening assemblies with each of the communities visited, with the aim of preparing a report of complaints to demand measures from the public authorities regarding violations of human and housing rights, as well as to make visible urgent demands from residents.

Finally, the research does not end here. The continuity in monitoring insurgent dynamics should be seen as a way of valuing non-dominant spatial practices, validating them as possibilities of real territorialization. However, it is important to highlight the need for the continuity of public policies to mitigate poverty and hunger. With the recent dismantling of such initiatives, social actors, actor-networks, social movements, among others, are forced to meet alternative ways to their demands of human ordinary life.

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